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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 002055

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EUR/SE FOR MCLEGG-TRIPP AND EMELLINGER

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM CY GR

SUBJECT: NEW ARCHBISHOP: WITH THRONE SECURED, MORE TOLERANT?

REF: A. NICOSIA 1906

1B. NICOSIA 1592

1C. NICOSIA 2051

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Schlicher, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In his December 20 courtesy call on new Church of Cyprus Archbishop Chrysostomos II, the Ambassador was pleased to see the hard-line leader adopting a softer stance. Particularly noteworthy was the Archbishop's pledge to roll out the red carpet for his Turkish Cypriot counterpart, Mufti Ahmet Yonluer. Confident and secure -- with contentious Church elections well behind him (Refs A, B) -- the previously hard-line Chrysostomos several times declared he would "tell" the government to enact confidence building measures intended to lower tensions on the island. Additionally, he appeared willing to cooperate with the Embassy on cultural heritage preservation and anti-TIP initiatives. We intend to test his newfound "religion" soon.
END SUMMARY.

Turning over a New Leaf?

12. (SBU) The Ambassador December 20 paid a courtesy call on Chrysostomos II, the Church of Cyprus's newly-enthroned (November 12) Archbishop. He last had called on Chrysostomos in his earlier role as Bishop of Paphos; then, the churchman had exhibited a hard-line vis-a-vis relations and rapprochement with Turkish Cypriots. In this latest call, Chrysostomos appeared to have undergone a minor metamorphosis. Turning first to his public invitation to T/C religious leader Mufti Ahmet Yonluer for increased dialogue, the Archbishop revealed the two would meet sooner than many may have expected. Yonluer would cross the Green Line December 27 for lunch at the Archbishopric and a joint visit to the Hala Sultan Tekke mosque in Larnaca (the burial site, recently restored with USAID help, of a favored aunt of the Prophet Mohammed).

13. (SBU) "I have accepted in principle," Chrysostomos continued, "a reciprocal invitation to tour the 'occupied areas.'" The highlight would be a joint visit to the Saint Barnabas monastery near Famagusta (the burial site of the apostolic founder of the Cyprus Church). Chrysostomos admitted he had adopted a new position on travel to the north since becoming Archbishop; as Paphos Bishop, he had declared he would "never" cross the Green Line and railed against other priests who performed liturgies there. "The Mufti personally guaranteed," Chrysostomos claimed, "that I would not have to show my passport or ID to any authorities," a condition for his first post-1974 visit north, and a point he

would make publicly to justify his change in position.

"I will TELL the government...."

¶4. (SBU) Chrysostomos promised to "tell" (not ask) the government to encourage free movement from one community to the other, to complete de-mining in and adjacent to the buffer zone, and to remove customs and immigration operations from the checkpoints. Likewise, he declared his intention to sponsor bi-communal dialogue, looked forward to seeing T/C party leaders and "possibly even Talat," and hoped to host meetings of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots at Church-owned hotels. The Archbishop noted he had made the same points in earlier meetings with UNSYG Special Representative Michael Moller and British High Commissioner Peter Millet, who had urged him to adopt a tolerant and reconciliatory position regarding the Cyprus problem.

Not Averse to Seeking Help

¶5. (SBU) Surprisingly, considering Chrysostomos's earlier anti-USG bent and his efforts to maintain his distance from the Embassy, the Archbishop actively sought U.S. assistance in the meeting. Chrysostomos aimed to appoint an Assistant Bishop to attend to "enclaved" Greek Cypriots in Karpass (Ref C). He wanted the appointee-priest to spend several days with the isolated peninsula community and requested the Ambassador to help convince Turkish Cypriot authorities to allow the Assistant Bishop to pass freely. Further, the Archbishop seemed very open to UN and USAID assistance in renovating cultural heritage and religious sites, and even

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sought Embassy support for Church plans to renovate the Apostolos Andreas monastery in Karpass. He agreed with the Ambassador's recommendation to keep their joint efforts "under the radar," to avoid unhelpful media meddling and political posturing.

¶6. (SBU) Turning to other human rights issues on the island, the Ambassador raised USG concerns over trafficking in persons (TIP). Not particularly well-briefed on the problem, Chrysostomos seemed interested in getting up to speed, and open to further Church-Embassy cooperation. The Archbishop also was troubled by increasing inter-communal and inter-faith tensions on Cyprus, evinced best by the November 22 incident at the Nicosia English School, in which ultra-nationalist Greek Cypriot youths beat up five Turkish Cypriot students.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Chrysostomos's views on the Cyprus problem had mirrored his conservative, mainly refugee flock's since he became Bishop of Paphos in 1978. With the Archbishop secure in his new position, representing the entire Church, and having made electoral deals with more compromise-minded bishops, we hope this newfound willingness to cooperate with Turkish Cypriots and the Embassy is honest-to-God. Should his actions match his private promises, they would show Greek Cypriots that greater inter-communal dialogue, not property lawsuits and frozen EU accession chapters, is the key to reaching a lasting settlement. We intend to test the extent of Chrysostomos's conversion soon, specifically on TIP issues and cultural heritage preservation efforts in the north.

Schlicher